

# Constructions of regulation and social norms of tattooed female bodies

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### Abstract:

Over the last decade, there has been a substantial rise in the popularity of tattooing in the UK, and a subsequent increase in tattooed female bodies. As explored by Walter (2010), key for the women of today is that they have a choice, to conform to stereotypical constructions of femininity, or resist them. However, tension lies in the ways that these choices are already constrained by socially imposed boundaries. In exploring constructions of tattooed female bodies, a stratified sample of fourteen tattooed women were interviewed, with the transcripts being analysed using a discursive-narrative approach. Reflexivity forms a key part of the analysis, as I as the researcher am a tattooed woman, with some of the insider-outsider intersections informing the analysis. Here, the discourse of unwritten rules and social norms is explored, with a specific focus on the how tattooed women construct 'right' and 'wrong' choices in respect to the tattoos they and others get, the expectation and the normalisation of the pain of getting and having a tattoo, and finally, the generational difference in respect to how tattoos are accepted and understood.

*Keywords: bodies, women, femininities, tattoos, norms, regulation*

This chapter draws on literature from a range of disciplines, integrated with examples from my research with tattooed women in the UK, to explore the discourses of regulation that are produced about alternative femininities. The aim of this chapter is to explore discourses of regulation and the production of social norms, through consideration for women's tattooed bodies. The chapter is made up of three key sections; the first section presents a review of the literature focussing on femininities, self-regulation and embodiment, the second section provides methodological detail for how the research was carried out. The final section considers discourses of regulation of tattooed women's bodies, exploring how alternative femininities are negotiated, and how 'right' and 'wrong' tattoo choices are produced.

The feminine body is well researched within the Social Sciences, providing important theories that consider the variety of ways in which the body is understood. The focus on the bodies of women in Western society leads to expectations for how femininities should be embodied, what is considered as ideal, and what is considered as 'other'. Giving attention to 'other' femininities is of interest to me in relation to how they both resist and reinforce ideal representations of femininities. Being a tattooed woman may be considered as different and seen as 'alternative', so also serves to reinforce the kinds of femininities that are considered as 'ideal'.

The research presented here takes a feminist perspective, with an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is important when considering women, ensuring that voice is given to those who are not often heard (see

Crenshaw, 1991). In a field that is often dominated by white, middle class men, the experiences of women should also be given their own focus, especially as they differ so widely from that of men. Intersectionality shows understanding in that there is a difference for the way that women's and men's tattooed bodies are constructed and produced in society, and why it is important that we explore these differences. This research focuses specifically on the intersections of gender, class, and age in respect to being tattooed, though I am aware that there are many more intersections that women experience, including race, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation. These intersections are highlighted where appropriate throughout the chapter.

*Femininities, self-surveillance, and embodiment: A review of the literature*

Femininity and being feminine are imbued with expectations on how to dress, act, and behave. However, what can be said is that tattoos are not often associated with typical constructions of femininity. Femininity is not a 'one size fits all' concept – there are many ways of embodying femininities.

Tattooed bodies are able to traverse both conformity and resistance to feminine ideals simultaneously. Though perceptions towards tattoos have shifted over the past decade, tattoos on women specifically can be described as creating cultural 'noise' (Hebdige, 1979) as they fall outside of expected traditional femininity, into more alternative constructions of femininity. Through the agentic tattooed body, oppressive societal norms

are resisted, whilst also enabling cultural belonging. This resistance against traditional femininity enables women to gain control over their bodies (Roberts, 2012), whilst at the same time, enables the younger generation of women to enter into the fashionable trend of feminine themed tattoos (Young, 2001). Women who reject dominant notions of femininity by getting tattoos, further reinforce what is considered as alternative femininity, as well as ideal femininity. Their position reinforces and reproduces the established traditional notions of femininity (Atkinson, 2002; Day, 2010).

At various points, women may want to feel more aligned towards one group, and their identities can develop. This contests the association that tattoos appear on the already anti-social, deviant body (Cardasis, Huth-Bocks, & Silk, 2008; Nowosielski et al, 2012; Way, 2013), and demonstrates the value that tattoos hold to the wearer at any given time. In relation to placement, a sense of identity can be seen and interpreted by others, depending on the location on the body. The placement of a tattoo provides societal perceptions of class (Blanchard, 1991), sexuality (Pitts, 2003), and mental health (Birmingham, Mason, & Grubin, 1999) amongst other things, showing the difference that placement and visibility can make. In this regard, this will have an impact on how femininities are experienced, as those who have hidden tattoos are less likely to experience negativity (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004), or be subjected to stereotypical constructions of resisting femininity. With research focussing more on the visibility of a tattoo, rather than specifically considering the bodily

placement of a tattoo, there is a failure to acknowledge how the body intersects with the performance of femininity, and how tattoos fit within this.

Through objectification of the body, women learn how they are represented and constructed (Aubrey, 2006), and observe self-surveillance (Foucault, 1976) to monitor where they might fit in and how identities are formed through consideration of gaze and imposition upon the body. In a world full of rules and norms, tattoos are attained as a way of resisting regulation, and as a way of protesting against the consumerist culture of today (Langman, 2008). Women's bodies are held accountable in terms of what is deemed acceptable appearance and behaviour and hegemonic notions of femininity cannot be projected onto women's bodies that have been adorned with tattoos (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, these women are removed from an oppressive gaze, enabling them to construct their own reflexive and embodied constructions of femininity, and utilize the body to perform their femininities. Women's bodies are under constant surveillance, from both the self and others, and are often treated as a site of control and containment (Grosz, 1994). Through becoming tattooed however, women are able to challenge the oppressions imposed upon the body –

*'simultaneously occupying competing spaces of object, subject and process; practices of the commodification of the body and embodied subversion become complex sites for the re/negotiation of femininities and constructed feminine beauty standards'* (Craighead, 2011, p. 45)

In this regard, tattoos can be used as a way of embodying multiple femininities, and constructing the female body in a way that is personal to that individual, by giving them the agency to do so.

Through consideration for the various factors that can have an impact on the body, the ways in which femininity is monitored is clear. Surveillance of the self and from others makes women take account of their bodies, how they are represented, and how they represent themselves, and also highlights an integral gap in the research that does not take into account the importance of differences in tattoos, be it visible, private, small or large. Permanence must be recognised as a key facet for the wearer, in the tattoos they have, as well as how this interweaves with their own self-concept.

Femininity is a construct of the heteronormative world, which determines how women should feel, behave, and be – ‘one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one’ (Butler, 1990, p. 11). Societal norms are based on heterosexual men and women, and the ways that heterosexual norms inform our thoughts, actions and behaviours. Femininity forms part of the act that enables women to perform their gender - through embodying certain behaviours and actions, women are able ‘to be’ feminine. Femininity is part of the clichéd binary opposed to masculinity, established through language and constructed through social practices. The issue lies with what our society deems as a feminine or masculine trait, which shifts depending on time, context and culture. As Young (2005) has commented, we embody our identities, with gender being expressed through comportment. In this

sense, the body is used to perform gender, but is restrained within boundaries that our culture co/constructs as feminine. In contrast to this, tattoos also provide the wearer with the ability to challenge outdated representations of women and femininity (Longhurst, 1995). Young (2001) has also discussed how the practices of body modification challenge oppressive hegemonic boundaries, especially with regards to beauty, gender, and sexuality. In this respect, those who are considered as 'other' are able to re/construct their own narrative bodies, taking agency for them and forming their own self identities.

The context in which tattoos are displayed also plays a part in how they are embodied. Within social spaces where tattooed bodies are considered 'normal', such as tattoo studios and tattoo conventions, they more likely to be on display (Fenske, 2007), especially if they are felt to hold communicative value, with respect to its meaning, design, and the artist. Building upon this, Modesti (2008) notes how tattoo studios are a dedicated space for agency; being tattooed is an exercise in control, over both pain and body, and includes the performances of being tattooed, and taking part in the act of tattooing. What this research highlights is the importance of space and context for those with tattoos, and being able to effectively evaluate surrounding spaces as to the extent that the tattooed body can be expressed. Outside of these spaces, tattooed bodies are viewed differently, and will therefore embody gender differently.

Overall, it is clear through the exploration of my research where femininity is positioned within Western society – as privileged, constrained and



monitored. Though it is situated as such, we must acknowledge emerging alternative femininities, through recognition for how diverse femininities can be, dependent on a vast web of factors within each individual's experiences. Tattoos enable an understanding of the body, and provide a sense of control over the body in resistance to the hegemonic oppressive nature that society imposes. The ways in which gender is embodied will differ in accordance to numerous intersectional factors, as well as the space and context within which the tattooed body is located. The relevance of why it is important to gain an understanding of the experiences of women with tattoos must be acknowledged. The vast majority of research that is available on tattoos concerns mostly men (Cronin, 2001; Goldstein, 2007; Guéguen, 2012), or at least, does not fully understand the implications that gender has with regards to body adornment (Horne, Knox, Zusman, & Zusman, 2007; Manuel & Sheehan, 2007), let alone other factors such as sexuality and race.

#### *The methodological approach*

Fourteen women agreed to take part, providing insight into their experiences as tattooed women. Some of the women who took part in the research had been recently tattooed, and some of the women had been tattooed for as long as thirty years. There was also a variety of styles, sizes, placements and total tattoos according to each participant. It could be argued that the diversity of these factors is integral to the understanding of being a tattooed woman, as it illustrates the many possibilities in experiences, and produces a diverse account of the ways that tattoos are

attained and represented in today's society. Within this chapter, extracts are included from a few of these interviews.

As the women are of different ages, this will provide insight into how the body is perceived at different ages, and how these representations are constructed. As there is also research to suggest that tattoos can be utilized as a method for healing, consideration for those who are at the beginning of their healing process (Stitz & Pierce, 2013), and perhaps those who are older and have advanced through the process further, will enable examination of this experience.

Social constructionism refers to the ways that our realities are constituted through language, which produces how we understand it (Burr, 2015). Gergen (1985, cited in Burr, 1995) discusses four key principles in understanding social constructionism which are centred around production, construction, and negotiation. The world as we understand it is produced through exchanges amongst people, and these exchanges are historically situated, producing and reproducing our understandings of the world. However, the experiences that we have are not necessarily understood in the same way by others, therefore acknowledging how people construct and understand events differently. The understandings that we have about different experiences are not permanent, or fixed – they will change depending on social processes such as communication, conflict, and negotiation. Finally, negotiated understandings are important in how they intersect with other experiences that people have. Shotter & Gergen (1994) provides an important and well-rounded definition of social

constructionism, highlighting the role that power has in the production of meaning, reflexivity in method, and the voice it gives to the construction of identities. In addition, one of Gergen's (1994) five basic assumptions for social constructionism is that 'terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people' (page 49). This relates to the current research in the sense that the discourses that are produced from the tattooed women will be contextually located. Phenomena that is understood as socially constructed proceeds to normalise certain experiences - for example, gender and the way that it is embodied (Butler, 1990).

The use of qualitative interviewing as a method for research is justified, as the position I have taken to the research rests on the understanding that the self is constructed through language (Mason, 2002). My research explores the construction of the tattooed self as produced within discourse. Just as important as the justification for using interviews to generate data, is my own positionality in relation to the research. Whilst my positionality in respect to gender, race, class and disability may be clear, I also had to consider my own body, and the exposure of my tattoos when I was interviewing the participants. For consistency, I felt that my more visible tattoos, the ones on my arms, should be on display for all of the interviews. To me, this seemed important, as having all of my tattoos hidden may have an effect on the responses exchanged within the interviews. I'm aware that having my tattoos exposed will also have an effect, though given the topic

area, and my relationships with the participants, I felt this this would help them be more comfortable with how they responded. Whilst this approach has been criticised in respect to a potential exploitation of relationships and the information that might be shared during the interview process (Banister et al., 2011; Kvale, 2007) this is somewhat of a contested issue, with Oakley (1981) commenting how interviews involve a process of give and take, whereby information is also shared by the researcher, forming part of the co-production of knowledge in the context of the interview. Oakley (1981) furthers this point by arguing that it is impossible for researchers to remove themselves emotionally from the interview process, and that researcher engagement is preferable.

I followed Parker's (1994, cited in Banister et al., 2011) step-by-step guide for carrying out discourse analysis, the first part of which provides a process for analysing text, and the last part, a deeper analysis into discourse. The first steps involve 'free associating' to the text, so I made notes on things that came to mind as I was reading through the interview transcripts. Following from this, steps include identifying different 'ways' of speaking, and what these different voices serve to produce within the text. Deeper analysis conducted on the transcripts focus on how the discourses that are produced operate to naturalise certain things in their given contexts – for example, the construction of certain stereotypes of femininities being taken for granted as 'normal'.

### *Negotiating femininities*

One of the main aims of the research presented here was to explore how femininities are constructed in respect to tattooed women's bodies, and how femininities can be embodied or resisted. All the women who took part in the interviews used varying constructions of femininity, within and between each interview, and found it difficult to articulate a singular definition for what femininity was for them. In this first extract, we can see the tensions that arise between productions of traditional femininity and the tattooed feminine body:

*P: I really really want a massive black panther on my back*

*R: Covering your back?*

*P: Yeah, but I don't know, I've got a really nice back (laughs) but yeah I don't know, I don't know if I'd do it.*

*R: Does it represent anything?*

*P: I want something to do with strength right, and I saw this image of a panther, and it's just lying down, just looking, and it's absolutely, it's such a beautiful image and you can see the strength in his eyes, and that's what I want I don't want a pair of weights on my arm (laughs) I want something you know what I mean, I want erm something that's hidden but, you know that's what it is with me, I might be all loud and lairy and you know whatever else, but inside, I've got a lot of strength in me, you know, so yeah, I want something*

*that's going to represent that, but I'm not brave enough yet (laughs)*

[Betty]

Betty discusses in her interview that she understands femininity as a position of strength, as represented by the panther imagery. This extract highlights the negotiation she's making between productions of stereotypical femininity and her construction of femininity. She states how 'I don't know if I'd do it' because 'I've got a really nice back', producing a sense that if she gets a tattoo on her back, this would not be seen as feminine. It is as though her back would not be 'nice' if was covered in a big tattoo. She emphasizes the 'massive' size of the tattoo – it is not just a small piece of work – and therefore occupies more space on the body. The more skin that the tattoo covers, it would seem the more far removed the tattoo would be from traditional femininity (Madfis & Arford, 2013). Whereas tattoos that are seen as small, delicate, and dainty would be considered as something more associated with femininity, a 'massive' tattoo is a statement – though representative of femininity to her, it may not be read as such by others. She does not discuss the tattoo in relation to any other bodily placement – she has decided on her back – and does not seem to consider a compromise. The location is important as she can have 'something that's hidden', which produces a femininity that can still be read by others as 'good', as they are not likely to see the tattoo and cast judgement on it.

There is a clear sense of a right and a wrong way to express strength that is articulated within the extract above. She makes it clear that the panther

is the 'right' way for her to express strength, and she gives the example 'I don't want a pair of weights on my arm' to illustrate something that is more associated with masculinity, and physical strength, rather than a more sleek, slender 'traditional' feminine strength (Grogan, Evans, Wright, & Hunter, 2004). She positions the imagery in a way that relates to her femininity, also ensuring that the body is read as feminine. A sleek and powerful panther provides a good representation of strong femininity more so than a set of dumbbells, which could be considered masculine. She laughs this away as though the choice would be obvious, that the more feminine choice is the right choice. The imagery is read as feminine, allowing an embodiment of femininity through the tattoo. However at the same time that the tattoo embodies femininity, it also subverts it – she embodies an alternative sense of femininity through the tattoo being large, bold, and placed upon a female body.

What is clear from the extract above is that there she is drawing on a discursive construction of the right way to *do* femininity, and explores how this might be embodied through the tattoo's imagery. She is self-regulating, in that she produces a notion of what femininity is, whilst at the same time, resists against this with the tattoo. It is acceptable for women to be both feminine and be tattooed, as well as feminine and strong, providing that this is done in the right way, ensuring that the body can be read as feminine. Other examples of negotiation were discussed that highlight some of the complexities in being a tattooed woman, in relation to fashion choices:

*I know people that have, erm massive calf tattoos and in the summer they wear tights cus they don't like it, and I never want to say I can't wear that because of my tattoo [Nora]*

The inclusion of the size of the tattoo is an indicator as to how the tattoo relates to negotiating femininities. If the tattoo was small and dainty, it would be considered as more acceptable – the 'massive' size suggests that it is too big to be seen as feminine, therefore the clothing worn must produce femininity. Small and hidden tattoos are often considered as more favourable on women, with links being drawn between the visibility of a tattoo, the size of the tattoo, and the body that the tattoo is on (Hawkes et al., 2004). As the tattoo that is mentioned is not as hidden during the summer months when warmer weather would indicate a change in clothing, the wearer still chooses to wear items of clothing to cover the tattoo, ensuring that the body is still read as feminine.

As the women discussed within the extract wear tights, this would indicate that the issue lies in the tattoo being visible (or in this case, not visible) to others. This idea sits in opposition to Wohlrab, Fink, Kappeler, & Brewer (2009), who conclude that women are unaware of the negative associations formed of tattooed women, as a common reason that is cited for getting tattoos is to enhance personal beauty. Whilst women do choose to get tattoos for personal reasons, this does not mean that they are unaware or unaffected by representations formed by others. Nora does state that she wants tattoos, though she is aware that the choices that she makes in respect to her tattoo choices are not necessarily free, and does show that



she gives thought to the ways that her body may be read if she gets them. She does not want to be constrained in her fashion choices, and therefore she negotiates her production of femininity through her tattoo choices.

The ways that the feminine body can be read are numerous, and also complex. There are multiple layers of positionings related to gender, class, and age amongst other intersections which produce constructions of the tattooed feminine body. In the above extract, the issue is not just focused on the tattoo, but how the tattooed body intersects with fashion choices, and how this relates to the production of acceptable, classed femininity. Nora indicates that the size and visibility of a tattoo are factors in the body being read as feminine. Building on this further, the following extracts also focuses on the intersection between the tattooed feminine body and fashion choices, producing femininity as a kind of skilled consumption – the skilled consumer chooses wisely (McRobbie, 2009). Specifically, this extract focuses on a context where traditional constructions of femininities are considered important:

*P: I want my tattoos for me so I can cover them and show them when I want, like my sister, for her wedding, she made me wear erm, had long sleeve dress*

*I: Were you a bridesmaid?*

*P: Yeah, well it wasn't her it was her husband that didn't want them*

*[Irene]*

Western weddings are stereotypically high in constructions of traditional femininity, encompassing expected social norms for how the bride is dressed and presented, as well as other aspects of the ceremony and celebrations (Kozieł & Sitek, 2013). When it comes to being tattooed in the context of weddings, the debate mainly centres on whether tattoos should or should not be on display (Yang, 2014). As Irene had an important role in the aforementioned wedding – she was a bridesmaid – her tattoos would have been more on display. She gives the wedding as an example of how she makes her tattoo choices, in respect to her previous experiences of how her tattoos have impacted upon other choices, such as clothing. In this manner, the tattoo is produced not just as an object that allows for communication, but also, a consumer object, one that is skilfully chosen, and displayed in a way that she deems appropriate.

Irene explains that she was 'made' to wear a long-sleeved bridesmaid dress, ensuring that her tattoo was not on display. The covering of the tattoo feeds into stereotypical and heteronormative assumptions made about the feminine body, especially on the day of a wedding. Though it was not her wedding, she produces an understanding that the tattoo would detract from the day, and that her body should be covered so that this is not given any thought.

In relation to her tattoo choices, Irene does state that her tattoos are for her, so that she can 'cover them and show them when I want'. As in the previous extracts mentioned, this would indicate that the location of the tattoo is important for her, so that she is able to represent herself as she

wants to – she is agentic in the way that her body may communicate with others. As she can choose whether the tattoo is visible or not, she can determine the level of communication that her tattoo expresses, and where she feels this to be appropriate. In this respect, through her mentioning the long sleeve dress that she wore at her sister's wedding, she demonstrates how she was able to negotiate her tattooed feminine body with being read as stereotypically feminine – without the tattoo being seen. Whilst she states that her tattoos are for her, they are not obtained without consideration for how she may be read by others, so therefore this part of herself is negotiated. Similarly, she highlights her skill in choosing a consumer object, the tattoo, to be in a location on her body that allows her to position herself as feminine. She regulates herself, knowing the tattoo can be visible or not, which produces a simultaneous conformity to feminine ideals, but at the same time resists them through having the tattoo in the first place.

This extract shows what the constructions are around gendered representations of the body, especially in more specific and traditional contexts, such as weddings. The tattooed woman must negotiate the constructions of the (ideal) feminine body, the consuming body, and constructions of feminine agency as 'choosing' and making 'skilful and authentic choices'. However, this research does not seek to simplify the complexities of the feminine body, and how tattoos are constructed.

### *'Right' and 'wrong' ways of being tattooed*

In this section, I explore the less overt and more implicit 'rules' that govern women's accounts of their tattoos. In particular, these are constituted around normative assumptions of the 'right' and 'wrong' way to be tattooed. The following extract provides an example of how not to 'do' tattoos:

*I think like with the bloggers and stuff on Instagram, people watch others too much, then it's like well you've got that so I want that. I've stopped reading magazines because the amount of shit that's in them, you have to live like this and you have to eat this and you have to do this, you know, and I'm thinking, why (laughs) I don't get it, I'll give you an example, like Cara Delevingne had something to do with bacon tattoos right, I don't know if it's just fake ones, random, but I guarantee you right, that they'll be at least one person following her on Instagram who has a bacon tattoo, do you know what I mean, it doesn't mean anything to them, they'll just do it because of who she is, it's insane [Betty]*

In this extract from Betty, she is positioning herself as a 'skilful consumer', a person who is 'in the know' in respect to making the 'right' choices about her tattoos. The main feature of this extract is that she does not discuss her own tattoo choices, but rather, she discusses the poor tattoo choices of other people, producing a 'me versus them' position, where she is skilful, and therefore better in respect to her tattoo choices. She discusses how

people conform to those who are 'celebrities' or 'well-known', and therefore more likely to be emulated. She positions this negatively, reinforcing the notion that these people are not making authentic tattoo choices. At the same time, she also positions herself as 'knowing', and above/better than those who would choose to get a tattoo after following a celebrity, therefore, her tattoos are better – she appreciates the artwork, and has taste in respect to her choices (DeMello, 2000). She gives an 'extreme' example of someone with a bacon tattoo, representing something silly and seemingly not an authentic or meaningful choice. The bacon tattoo is an example of a 'tacky' tattoo (Dann, Callaghan, & Fellin, 2016), and as discussed by Allen & Mendick (2013), female 'improper celebrities' – those associated with social media and other similar media outlets – are considered to have low cultural value, with the construction of 'tackiness' being normative within this social space. Betty looks to remove herself from this association as she positions herself as independent and not someone who follows trends ('people watch others too much...I've stopped reading magazines'). She is producing a notion that conformity to trends is tacky, and she does not like to follow trends – it is not so much rebellion, but more an anti-conformity, which is positioned as a 'good' choice in being true to herself.

Contextually, a narrative emerges that details a chronological self-development; a before and after story is given in respect to her journey as a skilful consumer. She states that she 'stopped reading magazines because the amount of shit that's in them', which highlights that there was

a time when she did read them, and there has been a change in the view towards conformity and trends ('you have to live like this and you have to eat this and you have to do this, you know, and I'm thinking, why'). She has challenged what she considered as feminine and the associated behaviours, and has moved past it – she has become 'skilful' in seeing these societal constructions of stereotypical femininity and creating her own understanding of femininity. In respect to the language that is being produced here, she draws attention to her actively thinking about these constructions – she is not passively agreeing with and conforming to them. This is related back to tattoos, and shows how she makes sense of tattoos through her commenting that the tattoos of those who copy celebrity trends will not 'mean anything to them'. Here, she produces a sense that tattoos are done 'right' if they hold meaning to the wearer, and also, that a tattoo without meaning does not produce an authentic sense of self – it comes to represent trends in society rather than the person the tattoo is on (Riley & Cahill, 2005). The notion of authenticity that emerges in this extract functions to legitimate the importance of meaning in tattoos, and produces a construction of 'tackiness' in those who do not get their tattoos for the 'right' reasons.

Continuing with a similar focus in the 'right' choice for tattoos being related to authenticity, Gabrielle talks about her views towards joke-related tattoos:

*A lady had every single name of her cats that she had, every cat that she had on her back it was covered, it was covered (pause) what's*

*bad is when people have like shhh or moustaches written like on their finger (laughs) I do think that's a bit weird ent it (laughs) it's just a funny thing isn't it they're just messing about its like a joke*  
[Gabrielle]

Rather than this being about the tattoos in themselves being the issue, this shows the issue with jokey-style tattoos, that aren't considered as 'serious' or 'normal' tattoos. Whilst the first woman that Gabrielle refers to seems to have tattoos that are of meaning to her, the sheer amount of tattoos, constructed as excessive, and the subject matter, the repetition of cats, sees this woman produced as 'not normal' – the tattoos are too different to be taken seriously. The repetition of the fact that this woman was 'covered' emphasises the issue that is held with women who have extensive body coverage. This shows that even within the community of those who are tattooed – often constructed as the 'other' – that certain types of tattoos are considered as too much (Thompson, 2015).

Similar to the previous extract from Betty, Gabrielle is also talking about other women with tattoos, reinforcing the construction that she is 'knowing' in her tattoo choices. What is different here is that the cat tattoos that are referred to seem to hold meaning to the wearer, and whilst meaning is usually seen as the 'right' way to do a tattoo, in this instance, it is the lack of seriousness that plays a role in the perception of the tattooed person.

She also gives examples of other tattoos that she considers as 'bad' – tattoos that have seen to be 'trending' in recent times (Scott, 2016). In

respect to these examples, she produces a sense that tattoos related to societal trends are an issue, rather than having something that is meaningful to the person. These examples are also positioned as tattoos that are almost for the benefit of other people – they are there to make other people laugh, and it is their reaction that is sought after, rather than the tattoo being obtained for the wearer themselves. Similar to previous accounts, for a tattoo to be done right, it has to represent an authentic sense of self – following fashionable trends is not positioned as authentic. Through the tattoo being constructed as a joke, a representation is produced of the wearer (Kosut, 2000), which is not seen as 'right'.

As a position is being created that meaningful tattoos are authentic and 'right' for the wearer, it seems plausible to assume that tattoos provide an external representation of someone's personality. This is discussed by Jean in her interview:

*I think tattoos in general do show peoples personality cus its like what represents me, erm so yeah, so even people that do choose like a random thing it has to mean something to that person or you wouldn't get it, unless it's something ridiculous like Harry Styles had all the names of the girls he slept with when he was on holiday or some guy that got the Nandos [end] [Jean]*

At the start of this extract, Jean makes a statement regarding the link between personality and tattoos, because this is how *she has experienced it*. From her perspective, this is the 'right' way for a tattoo to be done, and



she had done it the 'right' way because her tattoos are meaningful to her and representative of the things that are important to her. Even in the consideration of people who might get 'a random thing' tattooed, she still sees this in the sense that it must have meaning to the wearer – she cannot see that it would have no significance, because a tattoo must have meaning. Within her interview, she discusses how her tattoo might be considered as different (Harry Potter related) and that also she would get a jar of Nutella tattooed because she loves Nutella. In this sense, this example may be considered as random to other people, but still contains meaning for her, showing how she makes sense of tattoo choices that are informed by her own.

She also provides examples of how 'not' to do tattoos, with these being positioned at the extreme end of the spectrum. For Jean, these extremes relate to sexual exploitations, and the use of names on the body, and also the current trend of people getting advertising tattoos (Scott, 2016). Whilst these examples might be meaningful to the wearer,

### *Conclusions to be drawn*

The aim of this chapter was to explore discourses of regulation and the production of social norms related to femininities, through consideration for women's tattooed bodies. Through the discussions that the women had surrounding the ways they would and would not be tattooed, some of the norms surrounding tattoo practices are made apparent. The social norms in relation to tattoos serves to function as a policing of tattooing, and the

right way to do it. Femininities and the ways that they are represented are complex, with multiple personal and societal issues being considered in relation to being a tattooed woman. Resistance against traditional constructions of femininities serves to produce constructions of alternative femininities, with the women negotiating what these constructions are for them. The visibility (or not) of the tattoo also feeds into negotiations of femininities in that the women feel that they can choose how they represent themselves (Kosut, 2000) depending on where their tattoos are located, but, the takeaway point is that the body of a woman will be scrutinised regardless of whether they have a tattoo or not.

The findings here show the women as both conforming to societal norms expected of their bodies, through the way they embody femininity, or how they produce understandings of femininity, whilst at the same time, resist these very regulations through the tattoo itself, and produce alternative constructions of femininities. Future research may look to consider the location of tattoos on the female body as to how they are perceived, and also, how the imagery itself conforms to or resists feminine ideals, and how these are constructed.

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